

# ***FPFWC Christian Development***



## **Courageous Prophets of Change**

May 2021

Spring Quarter

**May 22, 2021**

**Lesson #4 – Preaching to the Exiles**

SCRIPTURE TEXT –Ezekiel 18:1-9, 30-32

***Key Verse - All souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.—Ezekiel 18:4***

**ICE BREAKERS –**

1. Why do we like to have a ready excuse for our failings should they come to light?
2. How can you help young people to take responsibility for their own soul, regardless of where their parents stand with God?

**LESSON BACKGROUND**

Ezekiel, a contemporary of Jeremiah, prophesied during and after the final chaotic years of the kingdom of Judah. He was called by God “in the fifth day of the [fourth] month ... which was the fifth year of king Jehoiachin’s captivity” (Ezekiel 1:1–2). Jehoiachin reigned only three months in 597 BC before the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem and took him, along with thousands of the most prominent and skilled people of Judah, to Babylon (2 Kings 24:14). This detail dates the beginning of Ezekiel’s book in 592 BC.

The group of deportees included the prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:1–3). The ruin of Jerusalem was devastating for the exiles. Jeremiah’s book of Lamentations captures the anguish that the destruction of the city and loss of human life caused (see lesson 8). Though some were left in Jerusalem and wider Judah, the survivors to whom Ezekiel spoke were those taken away to Babylon (see lesson 8 Lesson Context). They lived together by the river Chebar.

The Babylonian exile created great uncertainty about the people’s relationship with God. Could God, who had allowed His holy city to be ravaged and His people carried into exile, still care for the people? And if He still cared, could He actually *take care* of them in a foreign nation?

**LESSON COMMENTARY –**

Having shown the justice of God’s judgment on the nation in the three previous parables, Ezekiel next demonstrated that individuals in Judah are not victims of their parents’ bad behavior but that they share responsibility for judgment because of their own sins.

**18:1–4.** A familiar proverb is again used (cf. 12:21–28) to correct Israel’s wrong ideas: **The fathers eat the sour grapes, But the children’s teeth are set on edge** (cf. Jr 31:29–30). This proverb replaces personal responsibility with blame, i.e., “What is happening to us is not our fault! We are suffering because someone else sinned.” People were accusing God of punishing them unjustly (cf. v. 25).

This proverb may have arisen from a misunderstanding of the consequences of sin. The Lord visits “the iniquity of the father on the children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me” (cf. Ex 20:5; 34:7; Dt 5:9). The point is that the wicked behavior of one generation has ongoing consequences to the next. It does not mean one person is punished for the sin of another. Everyone is personally responsible to God for his or her sins. **All souls are mine** said God, and **The soul who sins will die** (cf. v. 20).

**18:5–18.** The example of three generations illustrates God’s point. First, God gave the example of the “righteous” father who “practices justice” (vv. 5–9); second, the “violent son” of that righteous father (vv. 10–13); and third, the righteous son of a violent father (vv. 14–18). Each case described the individual’s actions and God’s response.

**18:5–9.** In the example of the first generation was the **righteous** man who **practices justice** (toward his fellow man) and **righteousness** (toward God). He did not worship **idols** (cf. 8:12; 16:24–25, 31, 39; 18:15; 22:9). He kept himself morally pure; he did not **defile his neighbor’s wife** by committing adultery with her (Ex 20:14; Lv 20:10). He maintained personal purity by not having intercourse with his wife during her **menstrual period** (forbidden according to Lv 18:19). He did not **oppress anyone**. He was concerned for social justice (cf. Dt 24:13–15). He did **not commit robbery** (Ex 20:15) or even **lend money on interest** (Dt 23:19–20). He gave food **to the hungry** and **clothing** to the needy (Dt 15:7). He kept away from **iniquity** and executed **true justice**. He was a sterling example of righteousness, obeying the **statutes** and **ordinances** of the Lord. As a result, God announced that **he is righteous and will surely live**.

Israel charged God with unrighteousness, but God responded with a challenge: **Is it not your ways that are not right?** (cf. Jb 40:8). God reminded Israel of the responsibility of individual behavior: **I will judge you ... each according to his conduct**. This is a call to **repent** and **turn away from ... transgressions**. Then God would give them a **new heart** and a **new spirit** (cf. Ezk 11:19; 36:26; Jr 31:31–34) in right relationship with Him. He repeated, **I have no pleasure in the death** of the wicked (Ezk 18:23; 33:11) and declared, **Therefore, repent and live**. Despite God’s compassion on the wicked and His call to repent, He also decrees the death of the wicked and holds those who fail to repent accountable. In this God is glorified as the Just Judge of all the earth.

**LESSON NUGGET** – Have you ever accused God of not being fair? The Jews were doing that and quoting a familiar proverb to argue their case. If the fathers did the sinning, why should their children do the suffering? God judges individuals-regardless of what their fathers have done. The Supreme need is for a “new heart and a new spirit” (v.31), which can come only through faith in Christ. “Turn and live!” is God’s loving call to sinners today. It is a matter not of fairness but of grace.

**Sources: *Moody Bible Commentary, Standard Lesson Commentary, The Essential Everyday Bible Commentary and Wiersbe Expository Outlines on the New Testament***